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NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD™

AFTERMATH #7

AVATAR™

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"I WAS IN THE MOUNTAINS WHEN THE EPIDEMIC STRUCK. I LIKE TO GO UP THERE ALONE TO GET MY HEAD TOGETHER, KIND'A COMMUNE WITH NATURE I GUESS.

"JUST GET AWAY FROM ALL THE BULLSHIT.

"THIS TIME, I HAD A BIGGER REASON THAN USUAL.

"THIS IS...WELL...IT'S PERSONAL AND I WOULDN'T NORMALLY SPILL IT TO STRANGERS LIKE YOURSELVES, BUT THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE, I DON'T HAVE ANYONE ELSE TO TELL IT TO...

"...AND I REALLY NEED TO GET IT OFF MY CHEST..."

"YOU SEE, I HAD THIS IDEA THAT TARA...THAT'S MY WIFE... I THOUGHT SHE WAS CHEATING ON ME.

"I REALLY HAD NO REASON. IT WAS JUST A LOOK.

"WE WERE AT A PARTY AT A FRIEND'S HOUSE AND TARA GLANCED OVER AT THIS GUY...RICO...

"IT WAS NOTHING. EYES MEETING ACROSS A CROWDED ROOM...BUT THERE WAS ***SOMETHING***...

"WHEN SHE TURNED BACK AND REALIZED I WAS WATCHING HER, THERE WAS GUILT IN HER EYES.

"SHE DENIED IT. SAID I WAS CRAZY. PARANOID. SHE SAID I NEEDED TO GET MY SHIT TOGETHER, LEARN TO CONTROL MY ANGER."

"SHE WAS RIGHT...

"UP THERE IN THE MOUNTAINS, AWAY FROM THE NOISE AND THE SMELL OF MACHINES AND PEOPLE, I *DID* GET MY HEAD TOGETHER...

"FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS, I TRACKED A DEER, A TWO-YEAR-OLD DOE. BEAUTIFUL ANIMAL.

"I HIT HER FROM SIXTY YARDS. IT'S TOUGH TO GET A CLEAN KILL FROM THAT DISTANCE, BUT I KNEW I WASN'T GOING TO GET ANY CLOSER.

"SHE TOOK THE SHOT IN HER FLANK AND RAN...

"I WENT AFTER HER."

"I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY HOURS I TRACKED HER. I WAS IN A STATE OF ABSOLUTE CALM THAT YOU ONLY GET WHEN YOU'RE HUNTING. THE WORLD DOESN'T EXIST. THERE'S NOTHING OUTSIDE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR PREY.

"SHE WAS LOSING A LOT OF BLOOD. I KNEW IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME.

"FINALLY, IN A CLEARING, I FOUND HER, LYING THERE... CALM... AS IF SHE WAS WAITING FOR ME...

"I WATCHED THE LIGHT GO OUT OF HER EYES...

"I SAW THE SPIRIT LEAVE HER."

"I WENT HOME EARLY. JUST DIDN'T FEEL LIKE SPENDING ANOTHER NIGHT UNDER CANVAS. I ARRIVED A LITTLE AFTER MIDNIGHT. OURS IS THE FIRST HOUSE YOU COME TO ON THE ROAD INTO TOWN. EVERYTHING WAS QUIET.

"I DIDN'T CALL OUT TO TARA. MAYBE IN MY HEAD I PLANNED IT THIS WAY... TO SNEAK IN... CATCH HER UNAWARES...

MMMUHHHH UNNNGGGHH

"WHEN I HEARD THE SOUNDS, IT WAS LIKE A FIST SQUEEZED TIGHT AROUND MY HEART..."

ALL RIGHT, YOU BITCH! DENY YOU'RE CHEATING ON ME NOW!

"I TURNED THE LIGHT ON, EXPECTING THE WORST. IT TURNED OUT THE WORLD IS FULL OF POSSIBILITIES WAY BEYOND WHAT MY IDEA OF 'WORST' USED TO BE."

STAN... HUKKK...HELP ME...

"IT ALL CAME BACK TO ME LIKE A FLASH FLOOD. EVERYTHING MY OLD MAN TAUGHT ME ABOUT ZOMBIES.

"HE WAS THE ETERNAL PESSIMIST. 'THERE'S A REASON THEY CALL THEM THE RESTLESS,' HE WOULD SAY. 'MARK MY WORDS...THEY'LL BE BACK.'

"'TAKE THEM WITH HEAD SHOTS,' HE TOLD ME. 'IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO STOP THEM.'

"I COLLECT WEAPONS. ALL KINDS...GUNS, KNIVES, SWORDS...

"I HAD A SABER ON THE WALL OF MY BEDROOM. IT WAS USED BY A CONFEDERATE CAVALRY OFFICER IN THE CIVIL WAR."

"I ALWAYS KEPT IT CLEAN AND SHARP. MY POP TAUGHT ME THAT, TOO. 'NO POINT IN HAVING A WEAPON IN THE HOUSE THAT ISN'T READY TO USE.'

"RECKON I OWE MY FATHER MY LIFE FOR THAT PIECE OF ADVICE."

I'M SORRY, BABY. I'M SORRY I DIDN'T TRUST YOU. I SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE.

I-I- LUHH

I LOVE YOU TOO, HONEY.

"I DID WHAT I HAD TO DO. THERE WAS NO WAY I WAS GOING TO HAVE HER COME BACK.

"IT WAS QUIET THEN. QUIET ENOUGH TO HEAR SOMETHING IN THE BATHROOM...

"THE SOUND OF MOANING..."

MMMUUHHHH

RICO?

WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING NAKED IN MY BATHROOM?

MMUUHHH-UHHH-I JUST-LEFT HER FOR A MUH-MINUTE. DON'T KNOW WUH-WHERE THEY CAME FROM.

IT'S *THEM*, ISN'T IT?

SHIT, STAN. I'M SUH-SORRY--

SORRY?

YEAH, YOU ARE JUST ABOUT THE ***SORRIEST*** FUCKING THING I EVER DID SEE.

UTAH. ROUTE 21 OUTSIDE OF GARRISON.

OH MY GOODNESS! WHAT DID YOU DO WITH HIM?

SENT HIM OUT, STARK NAKED INTO THE NIGHT!

I KNOW I SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT, WITH WHAT WAS OUT THERE, BUT HELL, HE SAT THERE LISTENING WHILE THEY TORE MY BABY APART.

CHICKENSHIT BASTARD NEVER EVEN TRIED TO HELP HER.

THEN THERE'S THE FACT THAT HE WAS FUCKING HER...

ANNE! THAT'S ENOUGH!

SHE HAS A POINT. ANYWAY, THE LAST I SAW OF HIM WAS HIS SKINNY BUTT DISAPPEARING INTO THE NIGHT.

"FUNNIEST THING I EVER SAW..."

"NEXT DAY I WENT INTO TOWN TO PICK UP SUPPLIES. I KNEW I HAD TO HEAD OUT, AND I WANTED TO GO EQUIPPED.

"THE GHOULS HAD OVERRUN THE PLACE BY THEN.

"I TOOK DOWN THE BIGGEST GROUPS WITH AN OLD STERLING SUB-MACHINE GUN. BRITISH, SECOND WORLD WAR. FIRED AS SMOOTH AS THE DAY IT CAME OFF THE PRODUCTION LINE.

"I SWITCHED TO MY COLT INSIDE THE STORE. A HANDGUN IS BETTER FOR THE LIGHTER WORK."

"THE SABER IS GOOD FOR CLOSE KILLS.

HEY! DON'T TOUCH MY STUFF!

"IT'S QUIET, IT DOESN'T NEED RE-LOADING.

"THAT SWORD DID GOOD SERVICE AGAINST THE YANKEES IN THE CIVIL WAR. IT FEELS RIGHT TO BE PUTTING IT TO GOOD USE AGAIN."

"I HEADED SOUTH ALONG TWENTY-ONE. I FOUND A LOCAL RADIO STILL BROADCASTING. IT GAVE DIRECTIONS TO A MILITARY BASE CALLED ***RED ROCK.***

"THE WORD WAS THAT THIS WAS A SAFE HAVEN FOR CIVILIANS. PLENTY OF FOOD, MEDICINE AND MEDICS. AND ENOUGH MILITARY TO KEEP THE GHOULS OUT IF THEY EVER MADE IT THAT FAR INTO THE DESERT."

AND THEN I MET YOU GUYS.

YOU REALLY THINK THIS ARMY BASE IS LEGITIMATE?

SURE. EVERYONE KNOWS THE ARMY IS UP AT RED ROCK. THEY MUST BE SET UP TO SURVIVE FOR YEARS. IT MAKES SENSE TO GO THERE.

WE'RE HEADING EAST.

FOR THE NEW BORDER?

DO YOU KNOW HOW FAR IT IS TO THE MISSISSIPPI FROM HERE?

EVEN KEEPING TO THE SMALLER ROUTES, YOU'LL HAVE TO PASS THROUGH A HUNDRED COMMUNITIES, ALL OVER-RUN WITH THE RESURRECTED.

HE'S RIGHT. WE SHOULD HEAD FOR THIS BASE AND SIT IT OUT UNTIL THE EPIDEMIC DIES DOWN.

I AGREE WITH THE SENATOR.

ME TOO.

SENATOR?

MEET MY FATHER. REPUBLICAN SENATOR FOR THE STATE OF NEVADA.

WELL NOW. I GUESS THE STATE OF NEVADA NO LONGER FALLS UNDER THE RULE OF THE SENATE DOES IT?

THEY DREW A LINE DOWN THE MIDDLE OF THESE UNITED STATES, RIGHT THERE ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI, AND THEY ABANDONED US.

I WOULDN'T PUT IT LIKE THAT.

OF COURSE YOU WOULDN'T.

JUST DON'T TRY TO PULL RANK ON THE REST OF THESE GOOD PEOPLE.

HEY, I'M ON YOUR SIDE HERE. I THINK WE SHOULD GO WITH YOU TO RED ROCK.

AND I THINK WE SHOULD KEEP HEADING EAST. WHO KNOWS HOW LONG IT WILL BE UNTIL THIS THING IS OVER?

I DON'T WANT TO SPEND A YEAR IN A MILITARY PRISON.

IT'S NOT--

--THEY'LL LOCK US IN AND PUT US UNDER MILITARY LAW FOR THE DURATION. YOU KNOW IT.

LET'S SLEEP ON IT. IN THE MORNING, WHEN EVERYONE'S AWAKE, WE'LL PUT IT TO THE VOTE.

BEAVER COUNTY. THE ROAD TO RED ROCK.

RADIO THE BASE. TELL THEM WE HAVE MORE SURVIVORS COMING IN.

RED ROCK MILITARY BASE.

MEDICAL WING.

DOCTOR SELENS, HILL NINE JUST RADIOED IN. NEW ARRIVALS ON THEIR WAY. THERE MAY BE INJURIES.

ALL RIGHT, WE'LL BE READY. IN THE MEANTIME, WE HAVE THIS YOUNG MAN TO DEAL WITH, DON'T WE?

YOU'RE GOING TO BE BRAVE, AREN'T YOU?

IT LOOKS SCARY, BUT IT WILL ONLY BE A TINY, TINY PRICK. YOU'LL HARDLY FEEL IT.

YOU CAN LOOK AWAY IF YOU LIKE.

I AIN'T SCARED OF NO INJECTION.

GOOD BOY.

WE'LL CHECK BACK LATER TO SEE HOW YOU'RE DOING.

OKAY.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I DON'T THINK ANYTHING. WE'VE HAD TOO MANY DISAPPOINTMENTS.

IF WE HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO CARRY ON OUR RESEARCH INSTEAD OF SHUTTING US OFF TO MEET THEIR DAMNED BUDGETS, WE WOULDN'T BE IN THIS POSITION.

HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?

FIVE-AND-A-HALF MINUTES.

THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN A REACTION BY NOW.

MAYBE THIS TIME WE--

--WAIT.

SHIT!

MMM--
UUHHH

MMRRRUURRRGGHHH

RUUUARRRRGGHH

MRRRUUARRRGGHHHUHHH

PATIENT 257 WAS GIVEN 5 CCS OF SERUM 40-D IN ORAL FORM, FOLLOWED BY INTRAVENOUS INJECTION OF 20 CCS OF INFECTED BLOOD.

INFECTION WAS MARGINALLY DELAYED. PATIENT FULLY TURNED AT SEVEN MINUTES AND THIRTY SECONDS.

TERMINATING AT 11.16 HOURS.

MMUURRRUUHH

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

HE-- HE WAS SUCH A SWEET KID.

I KNOW.

WELCOME TO RED ROCK.

YEAH... RIGHT.

GATEHOUSE SAYS WE HAVE A NEW INTAKE OF ELEVEN SURVIVORS. ALL HEALTHY.

GOOD.

"WE NEED ALL THE TEST SUBJECTS WE CAN GET."

TO BE CONTINUED...